

9 December 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: NSC 173 - United States Policy and Courses of Action to Counter Possible Soviet or Satellite Action Against Berlin.

1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff submit herewith their views concerning a draft statement of policy prepared by the National Security Council Planning Board entitled: "United States Policy and Courses of Action to Counter Possible Soviet or Satellite Action Against Berlin" (NSC 173) which, if adopted, is intended to supersede NSC 132/1.

2. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that the imposition now by the Soviets of a blockade of Berlin or of harassing measures tantamount to a surface blockade should be viewed in a different light from that attending the blockade of Berlin in 1948-49, when the military posture of the Allies was too weak to permit of forceful measures in the assertion of the Allied right of surface entry into Berlin. The measures taken then by the Allies, notably the establishment of the Berlin airlift, did result in the ultimate lifting of the blockade and are generally considered to have achieved a political and psychological victory for the West. However, the acceptance by the Allies of such a situation now would not only constitute a political setback of considerable proportions but would undoubtedly be widely interpreted as a sign of weakness vis-a-vis the Soviet Bloc, with consequent injurious effects upon United States prestige and leadership world-wide, and upon the determination of free peoples everywhere to resist Soviet domination. Further, since 1949 the Soviets have established facilities in and around Berlin which would enable them to circumvent certain Allied counterblockade measures of the type previously applied with effectiveness against the economy of East Berlin and the Soviet Zone of Germany. It is doubtful that the institution of an airlift, unsupported by effective counterblockade measures, would cause the Soviets to discontinue a blockade which might be imposed now.

3. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that if the Soviets again attempt to establish a blockade of Berlin or to impose harassing measures tantamount to a surface blockade, the

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United States, in concert with the British and French, should take early measures, including limited military action if necessary, to determine Soviet intentions and to demonstrate Allied refusal voluntarily to relinquish the right of access to Berlin. The measures set forth in paragraph 21, as now written, would not accomplish this purpose. On the contrary, these measures would hold the prospect of involving military elements in inconclusive actions under conditions likely to result only in embarrassment to the Allies and vulnerability to charges of vacillation or outright weakness.

4. In the light of the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend the following changes to NSC 173:

a. Substitute the following for paragraph 21, page 10:

"21. The United States, in concert with the British and French, should be prepared to use limited military force to the extent necessary to determine Soviet intentions and to demonstrate the Allied refusal voluntarily to relinquish their right of surface access to Berlin. If Soviet reaction to this course indicates their intent forcibly to deny Allied access to Berlin, the United States should consider implementing appropriate courses of action set forth in paragraph 26 below."

b. If the foregoing amendment to paragraph 21 is adopted, substitute the following for paragraph 26, page 12, delete paragraph 27, and renumber subsequent paragraphs accordingly:

"26. If the Western position is about to become untenable, it is the view of the United States Government that the Western Powers should be prepared to use limited military force to attempt to reopen access to Berlin. If determined Soviet armed opposition should develop, the Western Powers should not undertake to commit additional forces to meet such opposition in an effort to hold Berlin but would have to resort to general war. Prior to the use of force on a scale which might lead to general war, however, every measure should be taken to make clear to the Soviet Union the nature of our determination. Such measures should probably include full mobilization, appropriate redeployments of military forces, and a warning to the Soviet Union possibly in the nature of an ultimatum. Additionally, they should take measures in the UN and elsewhere designed to lay the best possible foundation for the forceful action which might become necessary."

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5. In addition, for accuracy, it is recommended that paragraph 4, page 19, be amended by deleting the words "Army constabulary" in the first and second lines and substituting therefor the words "1 Infantry Regiment and 1 Military Police Battalion".

6. Subject to the foregoing proposed revisions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that you concur in the adoption of NSC 173 to supersede NSC 132/1.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

SIGNED

ARTHUR RADFORD,
Chairman,
Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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(JCS 1907/101 - Approved as amended - 9 Dec 53)

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